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SUBJECT: DUSD LAWLESS' ALLIANCE MEETINGS WITH MOFAT, BLUE
HOUSE

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Classified By: A/Pol Brian D. McFeeters. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 7, visiting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (DUSD) Richard Lawless met with the following senior South Korean officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) and the Blue House: Senior Secretary to the President for National Security Yun Byung-se, MOFAT North American Affairs Bureau Director General Cho Byung-jae, and MOFAT Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Shim Yoon-joe. All agreed that U.S.-ROK Alliance relations had recently improved but that serious issues related to the ROK ability to address U.S. Air Force training range requirements and the use of burden sharing funds to pay for the relocation of the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division (2ID) remained to be resolved prior to the October Security Consultative Meeting (SCM). DG Cho clarified that the ROKG had accepted the return of the remaining 9 USFK camps on June 1 without conditions, but stressed that the ROK would propose a "re-inspection/validation" procedure be adopted for future camp returns. He also requested U.S. concurrence in the public release of SOFA documents pertaining to the 23 completed camp returns. DUSD Lawless stressed the value of the ROK contribution to reconstruction in Afghanistan and the importance of a continued ROK role in that effort. All three of his interlocutors indicated that the request was being looked at favorably, but warned that security for South Korean personnel in Afghanistan would remain the highest priority for the ROKG. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) While heading the U.S. delegation to the 13th Security Policy Initiative (SPI) talks in Seoul (reported reftel), DUSD Richard Lawless held bilateral meetings on June 7 with three senior South Korean officials at MOFAT and the Blue House. Those discussions, held with Senior Secretary to the President for National Security Yun Byung-se, MOFAT North American Affairs Bureau Director General Cho Byung-jae, and MOFAT Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Shim Yoon-joe, focused on U.S.-ROK Alliance issues, including camp returns, the Special Measures Agreement (SMA), the training range issue, and the need for the ROK to continue its helpful role in Afghanistan. The ROK officials he met with stressed the following points of view:

State of the U.S.-ROK Alliance

13. (C) Senior Secretary to the President for National Security Yun Byung-se used his meeting with DUSD Lawless to highlight the improved state of U.S.-ROK Alliance relations. He richly praised DUSD Lawless for his role in strengthening the alliance and helping to reshape it into a "more future-oriented partnership." The U.S. and ROK have mutual interests that extend far beyond the Korean Peninsula, Yun pointed out, adding that it was in the interests of both Seoul and Washington to work together to address other important issues around the globe. Yun cited recent alliance progress on the transition of wartime operational control (OPCON), camp returns, and the Yongsan Relocation and Land Partnership plans (YRP/LPP), as well as mutual efforts in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq, and pointed to President Roh's planned September groundbreaking ceremony at the future USFK headquarters site in Pyeongtaek as an opportunity to highlight the recent progress in alliance relations. He added that "a lot of blood had been shed" by both alliance partners during contentious negotiations in recent years, but concluded that the results had been worth it and that a degree of trust had now been restored.

14. (C) DUSD Lawless agreed that progress had been made in repairing alliance relations. He went on to stress the hope that remaining problems, such as the serious lack of training opportunities available to U.S. pilots on the peninsula, be resolved before Secretary Gates meets with ROK Minister of National Defense Kim Jang-soo at the SCM in Seoul in October. Yun expressed his understanding of the seriousness of the issue. He then raised the F-16 issue by asking for continued U.S. assistance in resolving the ROK Air Force's F-16 engine parts problem. DUSD Lawless responded that the U.S. was ready to work with the ROK Air Force (citing DAS for SAF/IA Bruce Lemkin's recent visit) to fix the systemic problem, but was receiving some resistance to doing so. DUSD Lawless and Yun both agreed that the U.S. and ROK defense chiefs had gotten off to an excellent start when they met in February, and again at the Shangri-la dialogue in early June, and shared the hope that their working relationship would continue to be a positive and productive one.

Camp Returns

15. (C) At DUSD Lawless' request, MOFAT North American Affairs DG Cho Byung-jae clarified in their meeting that the ROKG had accepted the return of the remaining 9 USFK camps on June 1 without conditions. Cho added, however, that in the future the U.S.-ROK Alliance would need to address the problem of differing environmental standards as ROK environmental law had become far more stringent in recent years than was reflected in the SOFA camp return process. For that reason, Cho said the ROKG would likely propose the adoption of some sort of "re-inspection/validation" procedure prior to accepting any future camps. DUSD Lawless responded by saying that the proper channels for such a discussion already existed through SOFA channels.

Release of SOFA Documents

16. (C) Turning to the ROKG's May 16 request for public release of SOFA documents relating to the completed camp returns, Cho stated that it was the policy of the ROK government to disclose as much information to the public as possible, and that the ROKG wished to follow that broad trend with regard to the camp returns issue. Failure to do so, he argued, would raise speculation within the National Assembly that the U.S. and ROK had something to hide. Cho said he had personally read the Tab A documents the National Assembly had requested and that he could not think of any reason why they should not be made public. He added, however, that since it is the ROK's confirmed policy is not to release SOFA

documents without the concurrence of the United States, it was necessary for MOFAT to formally request that the U.S. agree to the release.

17. (C) DUSD Lawless replied that the USG was taking the request very seriously, but that it could depart from established SOFA agreements the U.S. had with other countries. The request would therefore have to be very carefully considered, he said. He also pointed out that since some of the documents to be released referred to other documents it was likely that the initial request would open the flood gates. Furthermore, one of the documents that had been submitted by the Ministry of the Environment was a screed against the United States, accusing USFK of poor stewardship of the land. Cho replied that he clearly understood all three of those concerns, but that he nevertheless hoped the U.S. would agree to the release prior to June 25-26 National Assembly hearings on the camp return/environmental remediation issue. Cho stated that MOFAT would likely go ahead and release a summary of the essence of the documents if the U.S. did not agree to release them.

Special Measures Agreement (SMA)

18. (C) Turning to the ROK's "Proposal for a New SMA Formula," DG Cho asked DUSD Lawless to carefully consider MOFAT's proposed solution regarding the National Assembly's prohibition against using SMA funds for construction of USFK facilities under the Land Partnership Plan (LPP), stating that he needed the USG's help in addressing this "political problem." Cho said he wanted the SMA to be used as a symbol of support for the U.S.-ROK Alliance, rather than as a tool used by opponents of the alliance to undermine that support. Echoing the U.S. response to the proposal PM/SNA Senior Advisor Loftis had provided to DG Cho on June 4, DUSD Lawless explained that while the USG understood the political sensitivities involved, the USG position was that it was a problem created by MOFAT, and so up to MOFAT, not the U.S. Government, to appropriately resolve.

19. (C) In a subsequent meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister (DFM) Shim also asked that the U.S. respond favorably to the ROK's SMA proposal. DUSD Lawless responded by stating that was an impossibility, since the ROKG was asking that USFK move funds around in a manner that violated U.S. law. Furthermore, it was highly unlikely that the U.S. Congress would agree to fund the overseas construction of new facilities for the 2nd Infantry Division (2ID), Lawless pointed out. At the time the LPP Agreement was reached, the U.S. clearly stated that the USFK budget would fund the 2ID relocation and that the USFK budget derives funding from two sources -- SMA and U.S. Mil-Con. Lawless added that if the ROKG should persist in its argument that SMA funds cannot be used to relocate 2ID, the U.S.-ROK Alliance would face a worst case scenario situation sometime in 2008.

Afghanistan

110. (C) DUSD Lawless used his meetings with all three senior ROK officials to stress the value of the ROK contribution to reconstruction in Afghanistan and the importance of the Republic of Korea continuing to play a role in that effort beyond its current 2007 commitment. DG Cho said the request was being viewed positively within the South Korean government and that MOFAT was also taking a serious look at the proposal to link up an electricity transmission system from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. Finally, the possibility of the ROK leading a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was also being considered, Cho said. The ROK's biggest concern was security, he added, noting that the National Assembly had passed legislation requiring the withdrawal of all ROK military forces from Afghanistan by the end of the year.

¶11. (C) Senior Secretary Yun pointed out that the ROK wished to become more involved not only in Afghanistan, but in Central Asia as a whole. In that context, he said, the Blue House was considering what the U.S. had proposed "in a serious way." He cautioned that no decision had been made, but revealed that as an initial step the ROK would be sending a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan.

¶12. (C) Later in the day, DFM Shim applauded what he termed "a great U.S.-ROK working-level discussion on Afghanistan" that had taken place that afternoon. He echoed Yun's comment that all five of the Central Asian "stans" would welcome closer ties with the ROK and Afghanistan, and that broader opportunities existed for South Korea to help in the development and integration of the region, noting that there are many ethnic Koreans living in Central Asia. While there was clearly value to ROK troops staying longer, Shim warned that the domestic political situation in South Korea would not allow for that. Whatever role the ROK does play in Afghanistan in 2008 and beyond, protection would be a top priority, he added, making it clear that South Korea looked to the U.S. to provide that security and to assist the ROK in its nascent relationship with NATO's International Security Force in Afghanistan (ISAF).

¶13. (C) In his response, DUSD Lawless raised the possibility of the ROK partnering with other countries, such as Mongolia, that were willing to provide security, but unable to afford the level of reconstruction funding and expertise the ROK had to offer. All three ROK officials indicated they would also give that idea their serious consideration.

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